

Working with Scholarly Articles

This tutorial has three sections. It can be viewed as a whole or section-by-section. The following transcript applies to Section 3: Finding and Identifying Scholarly Articles. Transcripts for [Section 1: What is a Scholarly Article?](#) and [Section 2: Reading a Scholarly Article](#) are also available.

Section 3: Finding and Identifying Scholarly Articles

A scholarly article is one that is written by a specialized author, such as a professor or researcher who is seeking to contribute to a scholarly conversation with other experts by describing research they have done in their field. Knowing the function of common elements, such as the abstract, introduction, literature review, and methods and results can help you prioritize your reading and can also help you identify whether an article is scholarly or not.

There are additional clues and strategies that can be used to help you find and identify these articles as well.

When you search for a scholarly article, the best place to start is a library database, which is a collection of articles that can be accessed online, whether you are on or off campus. Some databases are general databases, meaning they have a lot of articles on a variety of topics, while others are subject-specific databases. In subject-specific databases, the topics of articles you find will be limited to a particular subject area.

You can search many databases at once using eDiscover, the default search on the libraries' webpage. This example search for dissociative identity disorder returns over 40,000 results. Not all of these results are scholarly journal articles. Some are books. Others are articles from popular publications such as newspapers and magazines.

Individual article databases may return a similar mix of results, depending on their content. If you know you are looking specifically for peer-reviewed journal

articles, a simple way to weed out non-scholarly journal articles is to look for an option to limit results to only scholarly, peer-reviewed journals.

In eDiscover, this option is on the left side of the screen. In individual databases, it may be located elsewhere. Clicking this option reduces the number of results. Books, media, and articles from non-scholarly sources should now be filtered out. Keep in mind, however, that aside from peer-reviewed articles, scholarly journals also often feature non-peer reviewed content such as book reviews, which will not be filtered out by choosing this option. You'll want to avoid this content if you are searching specifically for peer-reviewed articles.

If you forget that the option to limit to peer-reviewed articles is there or if you are working in a search engine like Google Scholar that does not have the option to filter your results in this way, there are other clues you can use to help you tell whether an article is scholarly or not.

The first clue is the article's title. Scholarly articles are written by specialized authors for a specialized audiences and the titles reflect the expectation that readers will have a certain level of knowledge about the field and the vocabulary it uses. The titles tend to be descriptive, which identifies the problem the authors were trying to solve and the method they used to try to solve it.

Next, look for the names of the authors. As stated in a previous section of the tutorial, anyone can participate in a scholarly conversation and they can do so through a variety of venues. Scholarly articles are a part of the conversation that tends to be written by experts with some authority in the field, such as professors and researchers rather than journalists. Professors and researchers will have affiliations with universities or other research institutions. Information about the author's affiliations can be found in the record for the article in the library database or the article itself. You can also Google the authors' names to learn more about their background.

The third clue is the title of the publication. The title should not be something you recognize from the magazine rack in a grocery store, like the New York Times or Time magazine. Even though these are credible sources, they are considered popular rather than scholarly and are not peer-reviewed. Titles for scholarly

journals often include words like journal, transactions, proceedings, quarterly, or studies, but not always.

The article length can also be a clue. Scholarly journal articles tend to be long, often 10 or more pages. If an article is more than 10 pages, it is likely a scholarly article. If it is under 10 pages, use the other clues we've reviewed to try to tell if it is a scholarly article or not.

Finally, the article's abstract can help you tell whether or not the article is scholarly. Remember that scholarly articles are commonly based on formal research studies. The abstract of a scholarly article will usually include information about the problem being solved, the reason it's important to solve this problem, the method used to try to solve the problem, and may also briefly mention the results.

Knowing to look for the peer-review option in a database and use clues such as the article title, author affiliations, and abstract can help you become better at identifying scholarly journal articles.

Scroll down to answer a Check Your Knowledge question to complete this section.

Check Your Knowledge

Based on your knowledge of the characteristics of scholarly articles, which of the following would most likely be the best option for a student who is trying to find a scholarly article for a research assignment on Facebook? (Click the “view record” link for each option to view the article’s record.)

- a) [Facebook Users Getting Better at Managing Privacy, Study Finds \(view record\)](#)
- b) [Attachment Theory as a Framework for Explaining Engagement with Facebook \(view record\)](#)
- c) [The Fall of Facebook \(view record\)](#)
- d) [Facebook Will Add Its Resources to Amber Alerts \(view record\)](#)

You Answered: B

Correct!

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You Answered: A, C, or D

Incorrect

Scholarly articles are written by specialized authors for a specialized audience and often feature titles that reflect the specialized background knowledge needed to fully understand the article's content. "Attachment Theory as a Framework for Explaining Engagement with Facebook" is a title that will attract readers who may be conducting research of their own on the psychological impact of using Facebook, but won't do much to attract clicks from a more general audience without a background in that subject area. Information in the article's record includes an abstract that describes a research study conducted by the authors, all of whom have university affiliations. The article's length, in comparison to the other options, is also a good clue that this is an article from a scholarly, peer-reviewed source.

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Example 1: Facebook Users Getting Better at Managing Privacy, Study Finds

If you know that the purpose of a scholarly journal article is to report on the findings of a particular research study, you might assume that an article with a title that includes the words "study finds" indicates that the article is scholarly in nature. However, the phrase "study finds" is more commonly found in headlines for news or magazine articles, which sometimes report on research findings that may be of interest to the publication's readers, many of whom may not be among the specialized audience of the scholarly journal where the research may have originally been published. The article reporting on the study will cite the study as a source and summarize its findings and why it's important. So while articles like these are not scholarly or peer-reviewed themselves, they can lead you to the scholarly articles on which they are based. If you click through to the article's record, other clues that the article is not scholarly include its length, the title of the publication that it is from, and the lack of university or research affiliations noted for its author.

Example 2: The Fall of Facebook

Magazine articles like this one tend to examine a topic of current interest in some depth, offering commentary or analysis of the topic. The authors of these articles may cite outside sources to support their ideas, including interviews with experts, other news or magazine articles, or scholarly articles, but do not conduct research studies to prove or disprove a particular hypothesis and the reader will not be required to have any special background knowledge in order to understand the article's content. The titles of magazine articles tend to be written in ways that are provocative or attention-grabbing, as a way to pique readers' interest and sell issues or attract clicks.

The title "The Fall of Facebook" is intended to intrigue readers who may be interested in learning more about the author's analysis of the popular social media site and why he or she believes its demise may be imminent. Further clues

in the article's record include the length, the lack of university or research affiliations noted for its author, and an abstract that describes the article as a reflection rather than a research study. This article is a popular rather than scholarly source.

Example 3: Facebook Will Add Its Resources to Amber Alerts.

The primary purpose of a news article is to inform the general public about topics that are of immediate interest. The content of news articles is based on the facts as they are known and rarely includes much in-depth commentary or analysis, unless it is labeled an opinion piece. This article is from the New York Times, reporting on an announcement Facebook made the day the article was written about a new aspect of its service that might interest the publication's readers. News articles tend to be brief, like this one, which is only a fraction of a page in length. Though the New York Times is considered a very credible source that reports on research as well as current events, it is not a scholarly one because its articles are written by journalists and they do not go through the peer review process prior to being published.

Check Your Knowledge

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